

THE COURSE OF MURIA LIFE: AGE

eat black gur' she fills his mouth with black stones and so kills him, then removes his brain and eats it. 775

She is said to be most powerful on the night of the anniversary of her death.

Sometimes, however, the Ondar Muttai approaches men in very different guise. In her enchanting aspect, one is tempted to describe her as the personification of the erotic dream. Thus the headman of Ulera village described how once in a dream a lovely girl came to him. Her hair beautifully combed, her neck adorned with necklaces, many combs in her head, she sat down beside him and smiled at him. 'Seeing her my mind was for her and I wondered if I could get her. Then she came and sat very close to me. She seemed to have large and lovely breasts. I caught them with my hand but there was nothing there. Then I went to her but found she had no vagina. All my power went from me and then I saw that she was a hideous ghost with one long breast across her shoulder and I awoke. All the next day I felt very ill.' This dream is typical of scores of similar experiences. 775 154

There is another very curious type of encounter with this ghost. All over Bastar (and I have found the same tradition in the Central Provinces) there is the belief that a man can capture an Ondar Muttai, 'bind' her with his charms and keep her as a wife.¹ I will give a few examples of this: 775

In Patlabera, near Keskai, a Halba was sitting in his field playing on his *chikkāra*. A Churlin came and sat on his instrument. As he sang he closed his eyes and she danced invisible upon it. He did this for many days until at last he opened his eyes and saw her. Then he 'bound' her with his charms and married her. She lived with him for twenty years and several children were born to them. But on the day of the marriage of their youngest child she rose into the air with a cry and disappeared.

A similar story, this time of a Ganda called Khokoya, comes from Bakrabera; another of a Rawat or Ahir from Chingnar, another of a Marar in Kolar, yet another of a Rawat from Milkunzar. A realistic tale comes from Kumli village:

One day a Rawat was playing his flute as he sat in the fields grazing cattle. As he played a Raksin came and danced to the music. When the Rawat saw her he 'bound' her by his charms to the ground and drove iron nails into her head, thus destroying her power of evil. He married her and had seven daughters from her. He married them all. One day he brought the youngest daughter to his house. Her mother said to her, 'Clean my hair and catch the lice that are tickling my head'. The girl began to clean the hair; she found the nails that had been driven into the skull and pulled them out. The woman immediately became a Raksin again and disappeared.

It will be noticed that in every case the man who keeps the ghost is not an aboriginal but a member of one of the lower Hindu castes living in an aboriginal village. These people are generally credited by the aboriginals

¹ See *The Belgis*, pp. 367ff. Rathoven, whose reports are sometimes to be received with caution, says that in Bombay there are three classes of 'Chudels'. The Poashi Chudel, a woman who has not enjoyed the pleasures of life, fondles children and renders good service to her bereaved husband. The Soahi Chudel was persecuted in life: she dries up the blood of men and revenges herself upon her family. The Toahi Chudel was a woman who loved her husband and still, as a ghost, brings him pleasure.—R. R. Rathoven, *The Fellows of Bombay* (Oxford, 1924), p. 196.

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781 Not only religious functions and duties are revealed in dreams. In Alor a chelik said that he sometimes dreamt the songs and dances that were to be performed on the morrow. Another chelik in Nayanar said that he dreamt once that he was able to do a new kind of dance and sing a song that he had never been able to learn in fact. After his dream he found that he could do both. At Kabonga, the Village Mother sometimes comes in a dream to tell the boys to dance, and next day they go to a neighbouring village and perform the Hulki.

154 Of the dreams recorded from chelik and motiari the majority were frankly sexual in their manifest content. This was perhaps what was to be expected; although the ghotul is hardly a home of repressed wishes there are some which from time to time pass through periods of stress and tension, and there are boys and girls in both types of ghotul who suffer the frustration of their desires. But where among ourselves such desires express themselves in discreet symbolism, the ghotul's frank and open attitude to sex permits the censor mechanism to lie unused. The most common ghotul dreams are those of 'eating, playing, dancing and sexual congress'.

A very interesting series of dreams were recorded for me by my wife from two motiari in the Binjhli ghotul. At that time (December 1940) this ghotul, which is one of those which does not permit permanent attachments, was passing through a difficult phase. There were about a dozen girls of eighteen years or more who were for various reasons unable to get married; they had been in the ghotul for a long time; young and beautiful motiari were growing up and diverting the attention of the chelik. Angry scenes between the motiari were not uncommon and some of the older girls were restless and unhappy. Such was the situation in which two of the senior motiari had the following dreams. I will give first those of the head girl of the ghotul, a motiari of about nineteen years.

I dreamt that I was sleeping with a chelik I love. I have often wept as I remembered the dream.

I have often dreamt that I was married.

On a dancing expedition I borrowed all the combs of a young and beautiful motiari.

I dreamt I was sleeping with the chelik I loved. He combed my hair. The next morning he gave me eight combs, for he saw I hadn't any.

And these are the dreams of her assistant, a motiari perhaps seventeen years old, a pretty girl.

I dreamt that I was sleeping with a chelik outside the ghotul. We were caught and I was fined three bottles of liquor.

I dreamt that I was sleeping with a chelik on separate mats side by side. I held him in my hands all night. He never took his hands off my breast.

I often dream of intercourse. When the boy approaches me I say, 'Hush, what's the matter with you?'

A chelik slept with me in my dream. He held my breasts tightly in his hands. I said, 'Don't do that, let me go'. He said, 'How can I help it? I always do it'. I said, 'You chelik have no mercy on us'.

In the Binjhli ghotul, the motiari sleep with their chelik only once a week. On other days, after an evening of strong sexual stimulation, the girls return to their separate house. Several of these dreams appear to show the influence of this. The longing for combs revealed in the first set of dreams and the obvious jealousy of the young girl who had many of them, reflects a common

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motive in ghotul life: the comb is the treasured gift of a lover and to have many combs is a proof of attractiveness and sexual power. The first dream of the second girl, where she slept with her lover outside the ghotul and was fined, reflects one of the methods by which the rule against too passionate an association with a particular person is avoided. 154 ●

It is very difficult to obtain the dreams of motiari; I cannot, therefore, say whether the fact that every one of those recorded has a sexual motif is of significance or not. But the dreams themselves are interesting and rather pathetic.

Everywhere I have found many dreams of frustration among the chelik. This is not perhaps what we should expect, but it may be that the only dreams they remember are those about an experience which is so unusual to them. Naturally, even in the ghotul, where sexual opportunity is so free, a boy or a girl will from time to time have sexual desires that cannot be satisfied at the moment. Such desires will give rise to dreams, but these must not be regarded as suggesting that the ghotul is generally a place of lost opportunities and frustrated desires.

Gadru of the Chapai ghotul had the following dreams:

After a heavy meal one night, I dreamt that I had visited a neighbour's house and was smoking a leaf-pipe. A beautiful motiari sat down beside me and said, 'Ea dāda, give me some tobacco'. But as I was looking for a mat on which we might sleep, I awoke.

One day when I was sleeping outside the ghotul, a pretty motiari came and lay down beside me. I said to her, 'O girl, let me do what I desire'. Her breasts appeared flat to the eye but when I pressed them I found they were *gatto dudo*, hard as pegs, to the touch. I mounted her but could not find her vagina, and while I was searching for it my water left me and I awoke.

One day I dreamt that I was going to another village and saw a motiari bringing water from the river. I said to her, 'Give me something; promise you won't refuse'. She caught hold of me and dragged me along; but when I looked at my clothes I saw they were stained with blood that was flowing from her, and I awoke. After this dream I went the following day to the bank of the river and made offerings to the Yer Kanyang.

This dreamer Gadru was nearly drowned when he was a little boy and was only saved with great difficulty. The Siraha declared that the boy's accident was due to his father's failure to fulfil a vow he had made to the Yer Kanyang to sacrifice a pig when he had been out fishing. Probably this old association appears in his third dream.¹

Here are some more dreams of frustration. In Chandabera, the Mukhwan dreamt

One night I was making love to the Aloa, but when I was about to have intercourse with her, she got up and ran away.

This dream actually materialized after three days, although before that the boy had never had anything to do with the Aloa. He said that if he had dreamt that he was actually having intercourse with the girl, he would never

¹ The belief in a 'drowning spirit' or Dubha and in the Jate Burhi, the old woman who lives in tanks and drowns the upwary, is probably still common in Bengal and Bihar, and is reflected in Muria ideas about the Yer Kanyang. See S. C. Mitra, 'Water Spirits in North Bihar', *Man in India*, Vol. III (1923), pp. 196ff. and the same writer's article, 'Superstitions Regarding Drowning and Drowned Persons', *JASB*, Vol. LXII.

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● 154 have won her later on. The dream of frustration, therefore, is sometimes a lucky one.

Then again, at Kokori the ghotul Kotwar dreamt that,

I went with the chelik and motiari to dance. All the other boys had combs in their hair and necklaces round their throats, but I had forgotten my comb and ran home to get it. As I was going, Dulosa caught hold of me and said, 'Come, *dāda*, come'. Just as I was going with her into the jungle a lot of people came by and I pretended that I was simply going to piss. The people went on, and as I was pissing Dulosa pushed me over and ran away. Dulosa was not a special lover of mine either before or after the dream.

One day Nirosa said to me, 'O *dāda*, I want to sleep with you'. She combed my hair that night, but afterwards when we were about to lie down together, another of the boys came and pulled her away, and I awoke.

This experience must be fairly common in the ghotul. The Kotwar of Kabonga described the following dream:

One day I dreamt that I was ploughing in my field and felt hungry. I went to bathe in the stream and sat down on a stone. The fish bit my feet. Presently a girl came to fetch water, and I said, 'O girl, where have you been all this time that you only come now?' Then I found that I was eating *jūwa*, but when I lifted the leaf-cup to my lips there was nothing in it but water. I was just going to speak to the girl when I awoke.

A curious incident occurred in Kabonga. Here the Diwan of the ghotul had been married for several years, but still held his office. He described one day how:

I spent the night in the ghotul and when I went home in the morning my wife was very angry. She said, 'Last night you took the Belosa by force, and the girl has told the whole village'. I was annoyed, but as I was going to find the Belosa, I awoke.

Two days afterwards the Diwan learnt the meaning of this dream. A boy actually did go to the Belosa when she was asleep. She had no idea who it was, and in the morning accused the Kotwar saying, 'He did not let me sleep all night'. Fortified by his dream, which told him that the girl was obviously in the habit of making false accusations, the Diwan ordered that she should be expelled from the ghotul, for she had brought disgrace on them by her lies.

I will give a few other dreams with a manifest sexual content. A chelik in Koiñbera told me of a dream in which he saw boys and girls dancing in front of the ghotul. He caught hold of one of the girls and had intercourse with her. While he was with her, a tiger (which is of ill-omen in this village) came and disturbed them.

In Nayanar a chelik said that he often dreamt that he was sleeping with girls from other ghotul.

The younger boys' conflict with their seniors is probably the motive of this dream from Binjhli, given by a rather unattractive boy:

I dreamt that I was sleeping with the Silo [the most attractive and beautiful girl in the ghotul]. I had my life in her. In the middle of the night she made me get up and lay my body on hers. But just then the Salya woke and said, 'A visitor has come. Give him

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your mat to sleep on'. So I had to get up and give him the mat on which we were sleeping together. I was very sorry, but when I came back, she took off her sari and spread it for me to lie on, and I covered her with my blanket. 154

In Markabera the head of the chelik said, 'If my ghotul-wife is away, I dream of sleeping with her. I chase her and often have her'. He sometimes experienced orgasm during such dreams. 'I once dreamt that I was going to dance in another village. I walked along the road with a girl I had always wanted. That night I was able to sleep with her in the other village.'

A chelik at Chandabera said, 'We generally dream of our earliest loves in the ghotul, for these are girls whom we never forget. We dream that they are sleeping by our side or running away from us. Sometimes we dream that we have gone out fishing with them or that we are on our way to a marriage dance.'

The seriousness with which the Muria treat their dreams and the reality they ascribe to them is clearly shown in the precautions taken the following day. I have already referred to various cures for nightmare. I will add a few more. At Bhopna a Muria said, 'If I dream that I have gone down under the water, I consult the Siraha and he says that it means that an evil ghost is coming. This once happened to me, so I got seven different kinds of wood and made a bonfire of them by the bank of a stream. I put some gur and ghce on the fire. Then I and my wife went round it three times, entered the water and ducked below it. We took off our old clothes and left them there on the bank, dressed in new clothes and went home without looking round.' This was rather a drastic and expensive cure. An easier means of averting the possible danger of a dream is this from Chingnar: 787 782

A dream of a fight between two people suggests danger from black magic. To avert this the figure of a man with a bow and arrow should be made with grass and a bad egg, a pig or a chicken should be offered to it. The little image should be thrown away outside the village and the danger will disappear. [754]

Gadru of Chaniyagaon once dreamt,

A beautiful woman came to my children and said to them, 'I am going to devour you, because your parents give me nothing to eat'. The next day my children fell ill, and the Siraha declared that their sickness was due to Lagar Deo, who was angry because the customary offering to him three years after the first child had not been made, and he therefore wanted to kill all my children. So I dedicated two pigs to Lagar Deo to be allowed to wander freely and killed three years later. Once I had done this my children recovered. 787 753 782

At Palnar, the Suel once dreamt that he was climbing up a huge stone. Suddenly he saw a chaprasi, he was frightened and tried to run away. He fell down and broke his teeth. When he awoke he found he had fever and only recovered after he had sacrificed a pig and made other offerings.

In Chandabera, a Muria jealous of the happiness of the chelik performed hostile magic against the ghotul. The Sirdar dreamt that one of the boys had died and his corpse was being carried away for burial. Soon afterwards he himself got an attack of fever. He was sleeping at home and dreamt that a chelik came to him saying, 'Come, let us go to dance at a wedding'. The Sirdar replied, 'I am suffering from fever and cannot go'. The chelik said, 'The fever has been sent you by such and such a person, you must drive it